

THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION: ENLARGEMENT AS REINVENTION?

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Prepared for presentation at the 10th biennial conference of the
European Union Studies Association (EUSA)
Montreal, 17-19 May 2007 (panel 3D)

EARLY DRAFT – NOT FOR CITATION

*Revised draft to appear in Edward Best, Thomas Christiansen and Pierpaolo Settembri (eds)
The Governance of the Wider Europe: EU Enlargement and Institutional Change (Edward Elgar 2008)

We are grateful to Elizabeth Bomberg for comments on an earlier draft. John Peterson wishes to thank colleagues at the Institute of Governmental Studies at the University of California (Berkeley) for hosting him while work was done on this paper in early 2007.

Abstract

Will future historians view the 2004-7 enlargements as a heroic step towards the unification of Europe, or the point at which the European Union's (EU) glory days came to an end? Much will depend on how the European Commission, a uniquely 'politicized bureaucracy' under constant pressure both to enforce common rules and to deviate from them, copes with enlargement. This paper reviews early evidence of enlargement's impact on the Commission. Its central argument is that enlargement has not fundamentally altered the role of the Commission, but it has reinforced the impact of several other changes that are 'secular' ones not exclusively or even specifically linked to enlargement. They include: the emergence of a younger and more flexible Commission, one that is more 'Presidential', and one which can no longer rely as much on its traditional monopoly power to propose formal legislation to influence EU policy debates.

Enlargement is one, but only one, amongst multiple rationale being used by reformers to 'reinvent' the Commission.

Only the most courageous contemporary analyst could claim to know what significance in the historical trajectory of the European Union (EU) will be attributed by future historians to the 2004-7 enlargements. Perhaps the radical expansion of the EU's membership will come to be seen as one of the most heroic, important and valued steps ever taken towards the political unification of Europe. This view assumes that the EU system will prove itself able to absorb an 80 per cent increase in member states in three different senses. First, the EU's institutions will smoothly and successfully integrate nationals from the new 12 member states. Second, the EU-12, many of which have recently regained their sovereignty, will pool it without much hesitation and thus enhance the legitimacy of EU decisions and institutions. Third, the EU system will continue to function without any 'seizing up' of decision-making.

Alternatively, 2004 might be viewed as marking the end of the EU's glory days. Afterwards, the unique European post-war experience of pooling sovereignty and delegating authority to enforce agreements to the EU's institutions would become a sort of museum piece. A system designed during the Cold War for limited ends, and which (by some accounts) generated many consequences unintended by its designers, would finally lose its almost miraculous capacity for agency. Especially given the failure of the Constitutional Treaty – a result that might be blamed in large part on enlargement itself (see Cohen-Tanugi 2005) – the competing demands of 27 governments would, by this

view, produce paralysis. To borrow from a leading analyst of European foreign policy, the EU would no longer be an ‘action organization’ and would become more like other international organizations (such as the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe): a ‘framework organization’ in which governments debated and discussed issues of collective interest but engaged in little or no actual collective action (Hill 2004: 159).

The present volume* is designed to give future historians a place to start, although it would be surprising if the analyses pointed ‘cleanly’ towards either of the two scenarios just sketched. It may well be that some EU institutions absorb enlargement without much difficulty, while others struggle, especially in the first years after 2004. An opposite problem is that the EU’s institutions ultimately and inevitably succeed or fail together (see Peterson and Shackleton 2006). Identifying the effects of enlargement on the EU system may be a different, and trickier, exercise than identifying its effects on individual EU institutions.

However, if our aim is to pinpoint enlargement’s effects on the European Commission, we could do much worse than look to a perceptive examination of the central dilemma facing the Commission from its creation, written by one of this volume’s editors and published over a decade ago. The dilemma arises from tension ‘between [the Commission’s] duty to develop and apply common rules and continuous political pressure for deviation’ (Christiansen 1997: 77). Living with this dilemma makes the Commission a uniquely ‘politicized bureaucracy’. It seems uncontroversial to suggest that this dilemma stands to become more acute for a Commission that must now serve an enormously diverse Union of 27 states, nearly 500 million consumers, and unprecedented economic disparities.

Of course, the Commission, along with other EU institutions, is different from other international institutions in that it ‘has the capacity and legitimacy to act relatively independently of member states’ assent’ (Christiansen 1997: 73), at least in theory.¹ In practice, the Commission usually only succeeds when it works with the assent of a critical mass of member states. The problem, of course, is that the critical mass in an EU of 27 is now much bigger than before. Has enlargement made the Commission’s job impossible?

In trying to answer the question, this analysis confronts the same issues which preoccupy other contributors to this volume. Specifically, it aims to identify the main challenges and pressures for change in the role of the Commission, especially those arising from enlargement. It also considers the nature and extent of change in the Commission’s working methods, the quantity and quality of its output, and its interaction with other EU institutions since 2004. The evidence on which it relies is, by nature, early evidence in two different senses. First, the post-2004 enlargements are still recent phenomena whose effects will only be revealed in time. Second, we draw on material from interviews designed primarily to set the agenda for a forthcoming attitudinal survey of the Commission (which itself investigates, inter alia, the effects on enlargement). Nevertheless, we make a clear and straightforward argument: enlargement has not fundamentally altered the role of the Commission, but it has reinforced the impact of several other secular changes not exclusively or even specifically linked to enlargement. They include: the emergence of a younger and more flexible Commission, one that is more Presidential, and one which can no longer rely as much on its traditional monopoly power to propose formal legislation to influence EU policy debates. Enlargement is one,

but only one, amongst multiple rationale being used by reformers to reinvent the Commission.

We proceed in four parts. Section 1 offers an overview of the lively politics of enlarging a politicized bureaucracy. Section 2 considers a second, major, life-changing event for the Commission: the Kinnock reforms of its administrative code and working methods. In section 3, we consider where the Commission presently stands in the EU's institutional system. Section 4 offers views from the coalface by reporting on interviews with top Commission officials about how enlargement has, or has not, changed its role, work and methods.

1. 'Enlarging' a Politicized Bureaucracy

The accession to the EU of Bulgaria and Romania in 2007 completed what Nugent (2004) has labelled the '10+2' enlargement. Although undertaken in two waves over more than two and a half years, it was clear politically that the EU (of 15) was committed to admitting all of a dozen new states, although the precise question of when was settled only in late 2006. After that, other candidates, particularly the Balkan states (especially Croatia) and Turkey, waited in the wings. But it was clear that there would be a pause of unspecified years before the EU enlarged again.

One effect was to remove – for the moment anyway – another big political project from EU's agenda, along with the Euro, the Constitutional Treaty, the development of a common foreign policy, services liberalization, and a new global trade round. All were either completed or stalled. As such, it might be thought that the Commission was set to become a more technocratic, apolitical body in an emerging 'post-vision' era in European integration. In any case, an EU of 27 member states was always going to be more

difficult to shift quickly or dramatically in any new direction, let alone to agree on some vision of the EU's future.

Nevertheless, there are numerous reasons, specified in this section, to think that the Commission is destined to remain a uniquely politicized bureaucracy. It is worth revisiting Christiansen's (1997: 77) original elaboration of this typology and quoting it at length to remind ourselves why the typology fits:

What detracts from the bureaucratic element in the Commission's activity – what makes the Commission 'less bureaucratic' than other bureaux – is the nature of continuous bargaining in the Union. The major fields of Commission activity – proposing legislation and supervising the implementation of decisions – are highly politicized tasks....the nature of much of the Commission's work – the overarching regulatory function it fulfills for the European Union, the large degree of symbolism that is often involved in EU decision-making, the continuing process of expansion of the EU's institutional framework, the ongoing process of 'constitutional reform' – has meant that numerous political forces take exceptional interest in the internal proceedings of the Commission.

This 'exceptional interest' has been on prominent display in recent years, in large part because of enlargement. Consider the Commission's own composition and how any proposal to change it resonates at the highest political levels. Recall how bitterly fought was the debate about the size of the College (now 27) of Commissioners as designated in the Constitutional Treaty (Norman 2003). After the Constitutional Treaty was rejected by French and Dutch voters in 2005 referenda, the angst in European capitals was

palpable after it was realised that the Treaty of Nice, which remained in force, required that ‘the number of members of the Commission shall be less than the number of Member States’ (Article 213.1) after the EU reached 27 member states. This provision had been agreed on the (arguably sensible) grounds that a College as large as 27 was unwieldy and inefficient. With the accession of Bulgaria and Romania, the Union had reached the magic number. It had to negotiate, eventually, some kind of rotation system to replace the one Commissioner per member state status quo.

Voices in the new member states (commonly referred to as the ‘EU-10’ before 2007) began to suggest that a way around Nice had to be found. The prospect of having no representative in the College who could appear in the national media, speaking the national language(s), and explaining to ordinary citizens why the EU did what it did was daunting for states still adjusting to EU membership. One official in the cabinet of an EU-10 Commissioner lamented that ‘it will estrange the member states from the EU not to have a Commissioner. We must have one per member state’.² As a leading MEP put it this way: ‘it is far more important for the Commission to be legitimate than efficient’.³

Even at the level of the Commission’s services, or Directorates-General (DGs, the Brussels equivalent of ministries), the newer member states took a keen interest in the intake of their nationals. The pace of absorbing EU-10 officials lagged well behind the Commission’s targets: fewer than 9 per cent of all Commission officials hailed from the EU-10 by late 2006.⁴ Recruitment to the Commission was closely monitored in eastern and southern national capitals and its slow pace caused considerable agitation. To illustrate, when Poland’s Prime Minister, Jaroslaw Kaczynski, made his first visit to Brussels in August 2006, the first meeting he held was with Polish European

Commissioner Danuta Hübner, at which the first issue discussed was the sluggish rate at which Poles were being recruited to the Commission.⁵ With both subtlety and weariness, a member of the cabinet of the Commissioner for Administration, Siim Kallas, commented, ‘we’re trying to balance spread and quality [of EU-10 officials] but politically in terms of raw numbers, it is never enough’.⁶

In other ways, too, enlargement revealed the Commission to be a politicized bureaucracy. For example, in a climate of much-diminished political enthusiasm for further enlargement, the Commission remained an institutional activist for it. The Commission clearly took a sort of institutional pride in engineering the 10+2 enlargements.⁷ Afterwards, multiple services – not only DG Enlargement – worked actively to prepare Croatia, Macedonia, Turkey and other candidates for membership. One effect was to encourage the Commission – whose College was nearly 45 per cent composed of ‘new’ member state appointees by 2007 – to be more pro-enlargement than other EU institutions and governments. The College’s handling of Bulgarian and Romanian accession provided evidence of the point: it recommended that more stringent post-accession obligations be imposed on them than had been imposed on any previous applicants, but recommended their admission nevertheless.

One logical reason for the Commission’s predisposition towards further enlargement is that the 10+2 enlargement could be viewed, in headline terms, as boosting support for the EU generally and even the Commission specifically. For example, the share of EU citizens reporting that they believed that their country had ‘benefited from EU membership’ jumped from 47 per cent before the 2004 enlargement to 54 per cent two years afterwards.⁸ Majorities of citizens in nearly all EU-10 states reported this view

in 2006, with many registering shares considerably higher than the EU average.⁹

Majorities in all of the 12 states that acceded after 2004 (except tiny Latvia) said they ‘tended to trust the EU’, with the total for the EU-10 (60 per cent) considerably higher than for the original EU-15 (45 per cent).¹⁰

Table 1 – Trust in the European Commission - %

State(s)	Tend to trust	Tend NOT to trust
EU25	47	29
EU15	46	31
EU10	55	21
Bulgaria	44	16
Romania	54	12

Source: European Commission (2006) Eurobarometer 65: Public Opinion in the European Union (spring 2006), http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb65/eb65_first_en.pdf

Enlargement also appeared to make the Commission more ‘popular’, or at least less unpopular by expanding the number of EU citizens who viewed it favourably (see Table 1). The Commission clearly suffered by association with the failed Constitutional Treaty in 2005. However, majorities in all EU-12 states (except Latvia) said they tended to trust the Commission by late 2006, a result significantly higher than the overall EU figure of 48 per cent.¹¹ The share of EU citizens who said they did not trust the Commission declined in 2006. While only around one out of five EU-12 citizens said they trusted the Commission, around one-third in the EU-15 reported this view.¹² In a sense, enlargement appears to be as pro-Commission as the Commission is pro-enlargement.

It was not always thus in the cases of previous enlargements. The first Eurobarometer poll, taken in spring 1974 after the first enlargement, today looks Neanderthal – full of errors and apparently typed on numerous typewriters – on the Commission’s web-site. It contains none of the now-familiar questions reported on earlier in this section. However, nearly all questions – in this poll as well as those taken over the next several years - showed support for the European Economic Community (as it was then) and all it did to be considerably higher in the original 6 member states than in United Kingdom, Denmark or Ireland.¹³ Similarly, the share of citizens who thought their state benefited from Community membership was higher in the original 10 Community states than in Spain or Portugal for several years after the latter two joined in 1986.¹⁴ Since the 1995 enlargement, shares of Austrians and (especially) Swedes reporting trust in the EU generally or Commission specifically have always been lower than the EU averages (which the Finnish totals broadly match).¹⁵

If enlargement can be interpreted as boosting the image and profile of the Commission beyond Brussels, there is also evidence to suggest that it is encouraging change in the way the Commission works internally. One of the Commission’s most experienced officials explained:

The Commission is now less cosy. Enlargement has brought us new blood and enthusiasm and people who are open to change...and that has contributed to change in our working methods, especially in terms of policy design and implementation. Both are now more difficult because we face much more

diversity [in an EU-27]. Designing anything that is legally binding is much harder. We inevitably look to more flexible, framework approaches.¹⁶

Under the Presidency of José Manuel Barroso, there were clear signs that the Commission was becoming less suspicious of new types of policy instruments such as voluntary regulatory agreements, co-regulation, the ‘open method’ of coordination, and so on (see Golub 1998; Heritier 1999; Windhoff-Héritier 2002; Windhoff-Héritier et al. 2004; Szyszczak 2006). Of course, the EU had been experimenting with new policy instruments for years prior to 2004 as part of its embrace – half-hearted or otherwise – of a ‘better regulation’ agenda (see Better Regulation Task Force 2004). This agenda became a much clearer priority for the Commission under Barroso than it had been previously, mostly because the President and his key allies were so committed to it. But enlargement was prompting changes in the Commission’s administrative culture and not just because of the ‘push’ effect of recruiting new, reform-minded EU-10 officials, which (again) was anyway behind schedule. The ‘pull’ effect of having to design policy suitable for all member states in an enormously diverse EU of 27 was considerable.

As a caveat, framework approaches were far more common in some sectors – such as environmental and enterprise policy – than in others, such as police and judicial cooperation in criminal matters, or what used to be called justice and home affairs (JHA). In fact, the pace with which the Commission produced formal legislative JHA proposals in the early years of the Barroso Presidency was sometimes breath-taking and often seemed designed to make political points. Without the Constitutional Treaty’s extension of qualified majority voting (QMV) to JHA, Barroso argued that it was time to employ

the so-called passerelle clause of the existing Treaties, which allowed the Council to make decisions by QMV without any Treaty change. But multiple member states, particularly Germany, remained cool to the idea. By way of response, one analyst claimed that ‘the Commission keeps cramming the [JHA] agenda with proposals to highlight how little consensus there is in this area’.¹⁷

Elsewhere, however, the Commission’s embrace of new, non-legislative policy instruments forced Barroso to defend his Commission from charges that it lacked ambition, particularly from the European Parliament (EP).¹⁸ ‘It’s a myth’, Barroso claimed in late 2006, ‘that this Commission is not legislating: 45 per cent of our work in 2005-6 involved new legislative proposals’.¹⁹ Nevertheless, the Commission showed a new acceptance of new, non-traditional modes of regulating, partly because of enlargement.

A final change hastened, but certainly not exclusively driven by enlargement was the emergence of a more Presidential Commission: one more dominated by the political and policy choices and preferences of its President. In some respects, enlargement made the Commission President’s job – never an easy one to start with – almost impossible. Surely, no political figure in the world had more ‘constituents’ than Barroso, particularly strong-willed ones within governments who considered themselves to have a legitimate claim on his time and agenda. One indicative barometer was the number of days Barroso was compelled to spend outside of Brussels: a total of 168 in 2006 alone.²⁰

More generally, the challenge of ensuring coherence in the College was daunting. In theory, the College is meant to uphold collective responsibility: all of its decisions, even those requiring a vote by simple majority, are unanimous ones which all

Commissioners must defend publicly. If they cannot, they are expected (in theory) to resign. In practice, Commissioners frequently disagreed with each other publicly under Barroso's immediate predecessors, Romano Prodi and Jacques Santer, who usually simply tolerated or low-balled it. Enlargement of the College to 27 members, however, potentially marked a step-level change. Far more now than when Coombes (1970) made the point nearly 40 years ago, it was unclear what was meant to hold the College together given that its members (unlike those of a cabinet government) shared no nationality, ideology, party political affiliation, or even – unlike past Commissions – ties to a particular geographical corner of Europe.

In important respects, the Commission had already become more Presidential under Barroso's predecessor, Romano Prodi. This shift was prompted by several factors, not least changes to the EU's Treaties in the 1990s that made it clear, for the first time, that the College worked under the 'political direction' of its President, who shared responsibility with member states for choosing its members (Peterson 1999; 2006). But the most compelling factor was the perception that the Commission had become chaotic and rudderless under Santer's Presidency, leading ultimately to the mass resignation of his College amidst charges of nepotism and mismanagement in 1999. The so-called Committee of Independent Experts (1999), convened by the EP to investigate such charges, certainly fed the perception.

Prodi headed a College of 20 members for most of his time as President. He took pains to reserve for himself the role of the main 'political voice' of the Commission. He also used the Presidency to dispense patronage widely, ensuring that his hand-picked operatives occupied key, strategic posts. Yet, to his credit, Prodi clearly realised that his

was probably the most talented and experienced (across the spectrum of EU competences) College in the EU's history (see Peterson 2005). Thus, most individual Commissioners were given considerable autonomy in their own policy area and rarely were subjected to meddling from the President. Prodi's Commission was thus both more Presidential but also more ministerial than past Commissions. One indicator, more than just symbolic, was that under Prodi individual Commissioners occupied offices in the same building as the DG for which they were responsible, for the first time in the Commission's history, à la ministers in ministries.

Under Barroso, Commissioners were re-housed together in the new, refurbished (de-asbestosed) Berlaymont building. There was little question that Barroso personally dominated his Commission far more than Prodi had dominated his. For one thing, his College was considerably less dynamic or experienced. For another, Barroso worked hard to give it his own stamp and impose his own chosen policy agenda (see below). Enlargement, however, was not a negligible factor. With an expanded College of 27, particularly with one per member state, the Barroso Commission risked outright paralysis and descent to the level of yet another intergovernmental bargaining committee without strong Presidential direction. Barroso's operatives frequently pointed out, with satisfaction, that the College had yet to have to vote on any proposed measure more than halfway through his tenure.²¹

Ultimately, it can be argued that other background changes were more important than enlargement (or the Kinnock reforms; see below) in shifting the role of the Commission. A short list might include a number we have not even mentioned, including rising concerns about climate change, energy security, international terrorism, and the

emergence of China and India. On all of these issues the Commission became potentially, at least, a stronger player precisely because it was so difficult to reconcile the needs and preferences of 27 states and their citizenries. At the same time, there was little question that enlargement made the Commission's job both much tougher and also - if the EU was to have ambitions and pursue them collectively – more consequential. The central point is that enlargement is one factor among many in determining whether or how the Commission reinvents itself in the new European Union.

2. Reforming a Politicized Bureaucracy

Of all 'angles' from which the Commission might be studied, the administrative reform angle has spawned the largest academic mini-industry.²² The so-called Kinnock reforms were a direct response to the management problems that had sprouted during the Santer years (as well as before) and were widely-viewed as a political necessity after the mass resignation of the College in 1999. They were piloted by the Vice-President for Administration under Prodi and former British Labour Party leader, Neil Kinnock (2004), who had previously coaxed the wholesale reform of his own party after years when it was widely viewed as unelectable.

The Kinnock reforms were announced as a package in March 2000. They were organized around three prongs: strategic priority setting and resource allocation, human resource management, and financial management. A progress report issued in early 2003 claimed that 84 out of 93 specific reform actions were complete or in the process of being implemented. Academic evaluations have varied widely in their portrayals of the Kinnock reforms. Several (especially early) treatments lauded them as an 'historic

accomplishment’ (Kassim 2004a) and evidence that the Commission could deliver on a ‘heroic if thankless task’ (Kassim 2004b). Others stressed that they were being applied to ‘a very unpromising a reform environment’ (Levy and Stevens 2004: 2) and a Commission that was both overloaded with tasks and risk averse (Levy 2006).

We do not propose to offer yet another verdict here on how effective, or not, the reforms will be in modernizing the Commission. Instead, we note (briefly) that the Kinnock reforms are bound up with enlargement in at least three respects. First, and very simply, the reforms were a considerable shock to the Commission in close proximity in terms of time with enlargement. Few administrations adapt smoothly and quickly to major changes in their working methods or the pool of applicants from which they recruit their officials. Having to cope with both in a relatively short period of time might be seen as a kind of ‘perfect storm’ for the Commission (see Peterson 2008).

Second, enlargement and the reforms were linked in the minds of many Commission officials. One reason why is that internal Commission communications about the reforms justified them as necessary in light of ‘the forthcoming enlargement of the Union, which would have a major impact on the tasks of the Commission and on its internal make up and culture’ (Bearfield 2004: 17).²³ But another is that (especially) personnel reforms, symbolized by a new administrative statute unveiled (coincidentally?) in May 2004, were widely-resented across the services. Especially younger officials, who are now, of course, disproportionately EU-12 nationals,²⁴ feel aggrieved by a new promotion system that doubles the number of promotions needed to get to the same administrative grade, with only half as much additional pay per promotion compared to the system it replaced. Meanwhile, a complicated system links appraisal to promotion

and is based on an unfathomable system of awarding points. A senior official in DG Administration admits the system, which is being revisited, is ‘widely-hated...The best case would be that the top 10 per cent could fly through the ranks. We are clearly not there yet’.²⁵ In fact, the reality is that many Commission officials, especially those from EU-12 states, believe that the purpose of the Kinnock reforms was to economize on the cost of enlargement while reining in the Commission by creating a growth market in scrutiny. Kinnock (2004: 11) himself perhaps lives up to his reputation for saying more than is really necessary by pointing out that the EU’s administration is inexpensive, costing only 5 per cent of the Union’s budget, and that in fact enlargement will make it even cheaper because of the reduced salary bill that comes with lowering the average age of officials.

Third and finally, it is worth asking whether the Commission has been made an even more politicized bureaucracy by enlargement. As we have seen, EU-10 governments are far less concerned about making the Commission a meritocracy than ensuring that they retain ‘their’ Commissioner and are allotted what they consider a fair share of senior posts in the services. Moreover, it might be hypothesized that the more member states are admitted to the EU, the more concern and emphasis there must inevitably be on control: particularly, ensuring that EU funds are spent correctly by a larger number of national administrations, including many with limited capacity for management or audit. A particularly revealing comparative study stacks up the Kinnock reforms against recent reforms of national administrations and concludes:

The [Kinnock reforms'] rhetorical flourishes concerning decentralization seem to have lost out to a strong bureaucratic logic of further centralization in the name of tighter control... There is a sense in which the reforms have themselves been bureaucratized during implementation, so that the original rhetorical emphasis on a more performance-oriented approach has somewhat evaporated under the welter of new rules on financial procedure, internal audit, and personnel management (see also Levy 2003; Pollitt and Bouckaert 2004: 236).

The same study notes that, ultimately, two contingencies surrounding the Kinnock reforms are what make them unique amongst public management reform programmes, which have sprouted globally (see Pollitt and Bouckaert 2004; Pollitt and Talbot 2004; Pollitt et al. 2007). First, the Commission reforms were a response to a perceived crisis following the Committee of Independent Experts' scathing indictment of the Commission in 1999. Arguably, this contingency 'biased attention towards an agenda of control (tightened procedures and audit) and away from the agenda of efficiency and performance' (Pollitt and Bouckaert 2004: 234). Second, the Commission has 'few direct contacts with citizens' (Pollitt and Bouckaert 2004: 234). As such, it lacks 'clients' who can be relied upon to defend it from this and future waves of reform that – whatever else they are designed to do – may have the effect of limiting or reducing its autonomy, prerogatives, or dignity. A politicized bureaucracy that lacks a political constituency seems a strange anomaly. But that is precisely what the Commission is.

3. The Commission in the EU System

It is never easy to get a clear read on the standing of the Commission in the EU system, for two basic reasons. One is that the Commission inevitably finds it expedient to hide its light under a bushel: specifically, to allow member states, especially the holder of the Council Presidency, to take political credit for agreements that it helps to broker. When the Commission does so, it often finds the next deal easier to broker. The Commission often may be more powerful than it wishes to appear to be.

Second, the Commission is, as Christiansen (1997: 82) shows, not just a supranational administration but ‘also an intergovernmental body’ (even though some of his evidence, such as national ‘flags’ on senior posts, is no longer relevant). It is probably more accurate to say that every interest, including national ones, with a stake in any EU policy is represented within the Commission than to say that the Commission internalizes and defends the ‘general European interest’. There is no doubt that the Commission is deeply enmeshed in the EU system, as one of its main legislative bodies alongside the Council of Ministers and Parliament.

Still, we have some early results on which we can try to gauge how and how much patterns of Commission’s interaction with other EU institutions have changed since 2004. The most data-rich treatments of EU-25 decision-making focus mostly (perhaps inevitably) on the Council, not the Commission. But they still highlight the earlier point about ‘enmeshing’, and find more continuity than change (European Commission 2006; Mattila 2006; Hagemann and De Clerck-Sachsse 2007).

More specifically, the pace of legislating fell immediately after 2004, but ‘recovered’ to where it was prior to enlargement by 2006 (see Hagemann and De Clerck-Sachsse). There was little change in the frequency or pattern of opposition to Commission

proposals, although member states used formal statements to signal their opposition more often (as opposed to actually voting no) and larger EU member states were the main dissidents less frequently than they were before enlargement. Predictably, the EU got far more done by resorting to QMV (a record high in the use of co-decision was registered in 2006) than unanimity in the EU-25.

In these circumstances, Hagemann and De Clerck-Sachsse (2007) find that mediation and brokering have become more important determinants of outcomes. Of course, the Commission has always shared these functions with the Council Presidency and Council General Secretariat, and thus the role of the Commission in an enlarged EU is a matter on which insiders 'have very different views' (Hagemann and De Clerck-Sachsse (2007: 25). Some claim that the Commission wields more influence than ever before, as revealed in (say) the higher frequency with which agreement is brokered at the 1st reading stage in co-decision, which occurred nearly 50 per cent more frequently in the first year and half after the 2004 enlargement than in the few years before (Hagemann and De Clerck-Sachsse 2007: 25). Others see the Commission doing basically what it has been doing for years: patiently and quietly coaxing compromises and building coalitions, usually in the background and between formal meetings of the Council and its off-shoots.

The most important difference between how the Commission works now and how it worked before 2004 may arise from what Hagemann and De Clerck-Sachsse describe as (2007: 25) 'its recent strategy of introducing less legislation with the intention of dedicating more rigorous attention to the individual proposals'. In a sense, we find the Commission finally delivering on Santer's pledge of the mid-1990s to get the EU to 'do less but do it better' (Peterson 1999). Here, again, we see a more or less secular change

to which enlargement has probably had some degree of homeopathic stimulus:

designing any legislation for an EU of 25/27 requires ‘rigorous attention’.

It also requires significant give and take with the European Parliament (EP). As indicated, Barroso is generally unpopular in the EP where he is viewed as lacking ambition, not least because he has shown himself to be considerably less committed to reviving the Constitutional Treaty than have most members of the EP. Moreover, Barroso’s better regulation agenda and embrace of new policy instruments have met with a considerable lack of enthusiasm on the part of the EP. The Parliament, after all, is an essential cog in the EU’s legislative machine. It could hardly be expected to welcome a Commission committed to feeding less legislative ‘throughput’ into the machine. Thus, relations between the Barroso Commission and the EP have been troubled but (again) not exclusively or directly because of enlargement.

But enlargement has not helped. Interestingly, and somewhat perversely, the College of Commissioners is larger in an EU of 25/7 but also less politically representative than in the past. Large numbers of MEPs now find that they lack ‘one of their own’ – a member of their own political family from their own member state – in the College. A member of a top Commissioner’s cabinet summed up the state of Commission-EP relations:

One of the effects of having no French Socialist or German CDU [Christian Democratic Union] member in the Commission is that it weakens the Commission’s relationship with the European Parliament. And the political dominance in Brussels

of the EP is unbelievable. It accentuates the disconnect between Brussels and the rest of Europe.

If there is such a disconnect, an important institutional mechanism for closing it is the Commission President's membership of the European Council. In fact, one of the most important determinants of the Commission's standing in the EU system generally is its President's standing in this EU institution. Commission Presidents lack any power base comparable to those of European Heads of State and Government and so must 'derive his authority from other sources' (Crum et al. 2004: 2). Of all of Jacques Delors' political assets while he was Commission President (1985-95), none was more important than the respect he commanded at this level, where he became viewed (at least for a time) as an equal by heavyweights such as Helmut Kohl, François Mitterrand, and even Margaret Thatcher (Peterson 2006: 85). Delors' capacity for hard work was legendary and it was rare that anyone in the room at a European Council meeting knew the details of any dossier better than the Commission President.

In contrast, both Santer and Prodi were frequently bullied by EU Heads of State and Government, despite each themselves being a former Prime Minister (of Luxembourg and Italy respectively). For his part, in the words of a very senior Commission official, Barroso showed himself to be a 'player' in the European Council.²⁶ Several EU summits towards the middle of his term agreed policy statements – no mean feat in itself in an enlarged EU – in which Barroso invested heavily, particularly the 2005 Hampton Court (informal) summit statement on globalization and the March 2007 Brussels European Council agreements on the Lisbon agenda on growth and competitiveness and

(especially) climate change. Arguably, Barroso showed himself able to perform the three tasks required of an effective ‘technocrat politician’: mastering his brief (*à la* Delors), leading the Commission, and communicating ‘convincingly as the permanent credible voice of the general EU interest’ (Crum et al. 2004: 2).

More generally, Barroso clearly wanted the Commission to become less obsessed with its own institutional position under his Presidency. Under Prodi, the Commission expended considerable administrative resources as well as political capital in debates on institutional reform, with effects that hardly seemed to maximize its credibility or influence within the EU system. The Commission’s (2001) White Paper on Governance heaped criticism on the member states and ‘intergovernmental’ EU institutions, was decidedly cool towards new policy instruments, and stubbornly defended the traditional Community method of legislating. Wincott’s (2001: 897) verdict was that it reflected ‘neither good politics nor a full response to the questions raised’ about governance given the EU’s imminent enlargement.

Prodi also made shaping debates on the Constitutional Treaty a central priority for his Commission. The final results were not unfavourable to the Commission, but far more in spite of than because of its efforts. Multiple units across the Commission worked on the Constitutional Treaty, leading to considerable duplication and waste (see Peterson 2006: 88-9). It was unhelpful to Prodi, as well as a sign of his weak leadership, that the College under his Presidency could not agree a unified position on its own composition. Yet, the Commission failed to agree such a position during three previous rounds of debate on institutional reform in the 1990s (see Gray and Stubb 2001). In all of these cases, including that of the Constitutional Treaty, the Commission’s inability to decide how its

own house should be ordered acted to marginalize it debates on institutional reform more generally.

Here, we might spot one reason why Barroso decided to prioritise policy and what he labelled ‘a Europe of results’. Barroso clearly shared the distaste of key members of the Prodi Commission, particularly Pascal Lamy and Chris Patten, for what the latter termed the Commission’s ‘dogmatic insistence on institutional prerogatives over substance’ (quoted in Peterson 2005: 507). In terms of policy priorities, Barroso insisted that the Commission focus on the Lisbon agenda, launched in 2000 under his own Presidency, as Prime Minister of Portugal, of the European Council (see Dehousse 2004). Perhaps ironically, the most oft-heard criticism of Lisbon was that it itself lacked priorities, originally containing 28 policy objectives divided into 120 sub-goals with 117 policy indicators to be monitored. A 2004 panel review of Lisbon chaired by the former Dutch Prime Minister, Wim Kok, poured scorn on member states for failing to deliver on their earlier promises to make the EU ‘the most dynamic economy in the world’.²⁷ Still, the Kok report gave Barroso ammunition for a White Paper in early 2005 that sought to give fresh impetus, via annual progress reports, to Lisbon,²⁸ and which was a precursor to the 2007 European Council statement on Lisbon.

Despite all of this, the verdict of one Lisbon-watcher was that a strategy of pursuing reforms in an array of diverse policy fields via the open method of coordination in 25/7 different member states was ‘highly flawed’ (Groenendijk 2006: 3). Barroso’s supporters were forced to play down the Commission’s lack of formal legislative powers in key areas of Lisbon, insisting that its concern should be bringing the greatest good to the greatest number of Europeans, regardless of what it meant for the position of the

Commission in the EU system. These arguments were by no means universally supported within the Commission. But it was widely-acknowledged that, as one senior Commission official put it, ‘the growth and jobs agenda feeds into all else the Commission does. It has given political coherence to the College’.²⁹

One reason why (amongst others) was, again, enlargement: an economic reform agenda seemed a natural one to many EU-12 Commissioners. Commissioner Dalia Grybauskaite, a Lithuanian, insisted that Commissioners from the new EU states were usually ‘on the side that is most supportive of reforms because we know what it means not to do that’.³⁰ There was also evidence that the largest numbers of EU-10 officials in the first years after the 2004 enlargement were being recruited to services with a natural affinity for economic reform, such as DG Trade and Internal Market. Again, we find the Commission’s position in the EU system evolving, partly – but only partly - because of enlargement.

4. Views from the Coalface

A final quarry to be mined for evidence of how the Commission’s role has changed as a consequence of enlargement is a series of semi-structured interviews with Commission officials. The interviews were conducted mostly with senior officials (some very senior) and for a variety of purposes, including the present analysis.³¹ The main purpose of most of the interviews was to probe perceptions in the Commission, particularly at its highest levels, about specific questions that might appear on a questionnaire, including ones related to enlargement, which will be the basis for a forthcoming, large-scale attitudinal survey of the Commission.³²

Respondents were presented in advance with a standardised list of (pre-tested) questions. Three of the four questions on which we report here were ‘yes/no’ questions, but one was open-ended and was asked with no prompting of responses, thus clearly necessitating the codification of answers. However, to preserve the considerable nuance and pertinence of comments offered by respondents to the ‘yes/no’ questions, many of whom qualified their yes or no responses, codification was required here as well.³³

All interviews were conducted in the latter half of 2006, which was probably the earliest that most officials could be expected to have formed a view of the effect(s) of enlargement. Care was taken to construct a reasonably diverse sample that included different categories of Commission official, including EU-15 and EU-10 nationals in the services, as well as officials in the cabinets of Commissioners from both categories of member state.³⁴ The sample gives us a decidedly ‘small n’ survey on a strictly limited number of common questions, but nonetheless yields an original data set. The results shed interesting light on perceptions within the institution about how and how much enlargement is perceived to have changed the Commission.

Table 2 - What have been the main effects of the 2004 enlargement on the Commission? (n = 20)

	Services EU-15	Services EU-10	Cabinet EU-15	Cabinet EU-10	TOTAL	%
New blood, energy, enthusiasm, youth	4	2	1	2	9	24
Not fundamentally altered Commission	1	4	1	2	8	21
Less cosy, more diverse perspectives/views/policy	2	2	1	1	6	16
Large, old member states less engaged	1	2	1	1	5	13
More use of English	4				4	11
More unwieldy college	1	1		1	3	8
More reform-minded	1	1			2	5

Empowers Commission	1				1	3
TOTAL					38	100
Respondents by						
category	9	4	1	6		20

The question put to the largest number of respondents was, simply: ‘what have been the main effects of the 2004 enlargement on the Commission’? Unlike other questions on which we report in this section, respondents were allowed to give multiple responses. Most provided more than one.

Table 2 seems to reveal a basic split between the view that enlargement has brought ‘fresh blood, energy, enthusiasm and youth’ to the Commission, and the view that it has not changed the institution very much. However, given the limited number of EU-10 officials that had been recruited by late 2006, we should acknowledge that it may be possible to hold both of these views simultaneously (**check on how many officials do**). We also find that a sizeable portion of the sample reports the view that enlargement has made the Commission less ‘cosy’ and brought new perspectives. Perhaps most interestingly, there appears to be a widespread view that one consequence of enlargement is that older, larger EU-15 member states are no longer as ‘engaged’ at the EU level, with France and Germany mentioned most often in this context.

Table 3 – Is there an EU-10 bloc in the College of Commissioners? (n = 11)

	Services EU-15	Services EU-10	Cabinet EU-15	Cabinet EU-10	Total
Yes (unqualified)	1				1
Yes (qualified) ³⁵	2			1	3

No (qualified) ³⁶		2		1	3
No (unqualified)	1	2	1		4

The data sets for our three other questions are based on smaller sub-groups from the sample reported in table 2. Asked whether an EU-10 ‘bloc’ existed within the College – that tended to band, act, and (if necessary) vote together – a majority of respondents replied ‘no’, with some qualifying their answer (see table 3). Yet, a sizeable minority answered ‘yes’, even if most who did also qualified their response. Let us leave aside how surprising this result would be to anyone who takes Commissioners’ oath of independence from the member state that appointed them as literal and an article of faith. If there is an EU-10 bloc in the College, it exists despite considerable diversity amongst the 10 states that sent Commissioners with full status to the College for the first time after May 2004. It also could be viewed as an historical anomaly: previous potential blocs, such as the Nordic group of states that accounted for one-quarter of all EU states after the 1995 enlargement, rarely acted as true ‘blocs’ (see Peterson and Bomberg 1998).

Table 4 - ‘Does the Commission work on the basis of personal networks more than hierarchy?’ (n = 10)

	Services EU-15	Services EU-10	Cabinet EU-15	Cabinet EU-10	Total
Yes	2	1			3
Yes (qualified) ³⁷	1	2	1	1	5
No (qualified) ³⁸		1			1
No		1			1

The results yielded by responses to our final two questions might seem to contradict. Alternatively, they might hint at a rather specific shift in the evolution of the

Commission. Table 4 reports views on whether the Commission works more on the basis of personal networks, as it was widely alleged to do during the Delors years (Grant 1994; Ross 1995; Drake 2000), as opposed to hierarchy. All respondents said (broadly) ‘yes’ with the exceptions of two EU-10 officials in the services, who would be in the category of official – new to the Commission and not a member of a cabinet - we might least expect to feel ‘networked’ in the Commission. Perhaps most interesting was the specific, highly nuanced set of comments made by respondents (reported in notes 36 and 37). There are hints that clashes between certain members of Barroso’s College – especially Vice-President and Commissioner for Enterprise, Günter Verheugen – and the services may be pushing in the direction of a more hierarchical Commission, and that the old, elite, French-dominated, Delorist networks are now a thing of the past. But there are also suggestions here that enlargement itself is a catalyst for more hierarchy, or at least a Commission that is no longer the remarkably medieval administration that it used to be.

Table 5 – ‘Is the Commission more Presidential now than in the recent past?’ (n = 10)

	Services EU-15	Services EU-10	Cabinet EU-15	Cabinet EU-10	Total
Yes	4			2	6
Yes (qualified)			1	1 ³⁹	2
No (qualified)		1			1
No	1				1

Is it possible that a ‘networked’ Commission can also be increasingly Presidential? Apparently so (see table 5) according to this set of respondents. Note in

particular that all from cabinets and nearly all EU-15 respondents think that the Barroso Commission is more Presidential than those which preceded it.

We should conclude this section with strong caveats about the evidence on which it reports. Again, it is drawn from a very small data set that provides just beyond anecdotal evidence on how enlargement is affecting the Commission and the way in which it works. Perhaps above all, the amount of research effort expended to generate even these modest ‘findings’ points to our need for more comprehensive evidence on the recent evolution of the Commission’s role and institutional life, of the kind that might (hopefully) be generated by the survey project mentioned earlier.

Conclusion (to be revised and extended)

We have found that enlargement has not fundamentally altered the role of the Commission, but it has reinforced the impact of several other secular changes that are not exclusively or even specifically linked to enlargement. Again, they include the emergence of a younger and more flexible Commission, one that is more Presidential, and one that no longer seems determined to exploit its traditional monopoly power to propose formal legislation to influence EU policy debates. We have considered how the Kinnock reforms are linked in time and space to enlargement, at least in the minds of many officials, and how they may well end up having effects that were not highlighted or even intended by their designers. The Commission’s role in the EU’s institutional system is evolving in interesting ways, but mostly because of Barroso’s strong stamp on his Commission, and the stark contrast between its priorities and those of the Prodi Commission. The data extracted from interviews point to a number of hypotheses worthy

of testing in future research, perhaps above all the possibility that the Commission is becoming more hierarchical. Enlargement is one, but only one, amongst multiple rationale being used by reformers to try to reinvent the Commission.

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¹ The Commission also has considerable independence in legal terms in specified policy areas, such as competition policy. For an overview, see Spence 2005

² Interview, Brussels, 4 July 2006.

³ This claim was made by an MEP (from an EU-10 state) at a private meeting in Edinburgh on 26 June 2006.

⁴ According to the Commission's own figures, published in its Bulletin Statistique (October 2006), only 8.6 per cent of all officials and temporary agents in the Commission were nationals of the EU-10 (see http://ec.europa.eu/civil_service/docs/bs_dg_nat_en.pdf; accessed 03 December 2006).

⁵ Interviews Brussels, 12 September 2006; and Edinburgh, 21 September 2006.

⁶ Interview, Brussels, 12 September 2006.

⁷ This pride shines through in many of the Commission's publicly-stated positions on enlargement. A prime example is European Commission (2006), which spins a very upbeat story of the effects of the 2004 enlargement, and is full of pronouncements such as: '[e]nlargement has shown its enduring value as one of the EU's most effective policies, successfully contributing to peace, stability and democratic development throughout the continent' (Commission 2006: 4). The same could be said about 'Myths and Facts about Enlargement', a web page maintained by DG Enlargement

(http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/questions_and_answers/myths_en.htm; accessed 30 November 2006). It boasts that ‘the European Union is peacefully unifying Europe... A carefully managed enlargement process extends peace, democracy, the rule of law and prosperity across Europe... The 2004 enlargement was the best-prepared in the history of the EU’. It is notable that Jan Truszczyński, a native Pole, was named Deputy Director-General of DG Enlargement in late 2006, a post which carries responsibility for the DG’s information and communication strategy (see <http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/06/1462&format=HTML&aged=0&language=EN&guiLanguage=en>; accessed 30 November 2006). Finally, consider that when a draft questionnaire for a (Commission-approved) attitudinal survey of Commission officials was reviewed in late 2006, the inclusion of questions asking Commission officials to report on their own views about the desirability of further enlargement were declared unacceptable on the grounds that the Commission was working actively to facilitate further enlargement and that promoting further enlargement was a publicly stated Commission policy.

⁸ These ‘headline figures’ are reported in the spring 2006 Eurobarometer poll (number 65), p.12, available at: http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb65/eb65_first_en.pdf (accessed 4 May 2007).

⁹ The only EU-10 state where a majority did not report this view in the spring 2006 Eurobarometer poll was Cyprus (40 per cent), while fellow micro-state Malta recorded exactly 50 per cent. Seven of the EU-10 states were above the 54 per cent EU average share of respondents reporting the view that EU brought their state benefits, with some (Lithuania 72 per cent; Slovakia 70 per cent; Slovenia 68 per cent) well above average. As caveats, it should be noted that different questions (such as ‘Do you think [your country’s] EU membership is a good/bad thing?’ or ‘does the EU conjure up for you a very positive/fairly positive/neutral/fairly negative/very negative image?’) produced more sceptical views, and that a later (autumn) 2006 poll generally suggested rising Euroscepticism in the EU-10. See spring 2006 Eurobarometer (number 65), pp.9-17 (full reference in table 1) and autumn 2006 Eurobarometer (number 66), available from http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb66/eb66_highlights_en.pdf (accessed 4 May 2007).

¹⁰ These results are from the spring 2006 Eurobarometer (number 65), pp.18-19. It appears that this specific question was not included in the autumn Eurobarometer poll (number 66).

¹¹ Eurobarometer (66), p.15 (full reference in note 8).

¹² These figures are estimates based on combined data from both Eurobarometer polls taken in 2006. A total of 33 per cent reported that they tended ‘not to trust’ the Commission in the poll taken in autumn 2005, while 29 and 31 per cent reported the same view in the two polls taken in 2006.

¹³ Eurobarometers 1, 3 and 4 (such as they are) are available at http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb_arch_en.htm (accessed 1 May 2007).

¹⁴ See the spring 1988 Eurobarometer (number 29) available at: http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/archives/eb/eb29/eb29_en.pdf (accessed 1 May 2007), pp.B72-3.

¹⁵ The trend can be observed by consulting any post-1995 Eurobarometer (at http://ec.europa.eu/public_opinion/standard_en.htm), although the specific question on levels of trust in the Commission has been asked only since 1999.

¹⁶ Interview, Brussels, 5 July 2006.

¹⁷ Hugo Brady, research fellow at the Centre for European Reform, quoted in *European Voice*, 16-22 November 2006, p.21.

¹⁸ See for example the barbed comments of EP political group leaders Martin Schulz and Graham Watson in response to Barroso’s unveiling of his Commission’s ‘citizens’ agenda’, available from *EuropeanVoice.com*, <http://www.europeanvoice.com/archive/article.asp?id=25407> (accessed 1 December 2006).

¹⁹ Quoted by *EuropeanVoice.com*, <http://www.europeanvoice.com/archive/article.asp?id=26699> (accessed 1 December 2006).

²⁰ Interview, Edinburgh, 28 November 2006.

²¹ This point was made in interviews with members of Barroso’s cabinet conducted on 5 July, 12 September, and 22 November 2006 as well as 11 January 2007.

²² The recent literature on the administrative reform of the Commission is larger than on any other topic. See the sources listed in (Szarek and Peterson 2007): 6-9.

²³ The author cited here is a Commission official in DG Administration.

²⁴ It should be noted that the Kinnock reforms included provisions for early retirement that lowered the average age of Commission officials by about 2 years (from 44 to 42) even before enlargement.

²⁵ Interview, Brussels, 11 September 2006.

²⁶ Interview, Brussels, 5 July 2006.

²⁷ See ‘Facing the Challenge: the Lisbon Strategy for Growth and Employment’, Report from the High Level Group chaired by Wim Kok, November 2004, available from http://ec.europa.eu/growthandjobs/pdf/kok_report_en.pdf (accessed 13 December 2006).

²⁸ See European Commission, ‘Time to Move Up a Gear: the European Commission’s 2006 Annual Progress Report on Growth and Jobs’, available at http://ec.europa.eu/growthandjobs/annual-report_en.htm (accessed 13 December 2006).

²⁹ Interview, Brussels, 4 July 2006.

³⁰ Quoted in Peterson 2005a: 9.

³¹ The interview sample (for question 1) consisted of one cabinet chef and six cabinet officials, the Secretary-General, two Directors-General, one Deputy Director-General, three Directors, two Heads of Unit, three Policy Officers, and one Programme Manager. Questions 2-4 were put to sub-groups out of this sample. All interviews were conducted in Brussels on 4-5 July, 11-13 September, and 20-22 November 2006.

³² The survey, which may be the most comprehensive ever conducted on the Commission, is being conducted within the EU-Consent network of excellence and is scheduled for February 2008

³³ Tables 3-5 list (in endnotes) specific comments, especially ‘qualifications’ that accompanied the choices of yes or no.

³⁴ The sample over-represents officials from EU-10 Commission cabinets. However, officials who are nationals of EU-15 states are, unsurprisingly, over-represented in EU-10 Commission cabinets. In fact, 3 of 6 officials in the cabinets of EU-10 Commissioners interviewed for this analysis are nationals of EU-15 member states.

³⁵ On official qualified their answer by responding: ‘Yes on specific EU-10 projects. But they are so disparate: take Malta or Cyprus and compare with Poland’.

³⁶ Here, ‘no’ answers were qualified with the following comments: ‘Not clear-cut. For example, on the services directive it seemed important to have all new 10 Commissioners taking a similar position. But

they certainly were not alone'. 'Nationality certainly plays a bigger role than what is healthy'. 'Rarely. The division is not usually old v. new states'.

³⁷ 'Yes' responses were qualified as follows: 'It is starting to change as the organization gets bigger. The College's relationship with the services is changing, with the overall effect of making the Commission more hierarchical'. 'We are still working on this basis, but it is different from the Delors days: the ENArque-based network has broken down over time'. 'Corporate work plans, which all DGs now have, are very anti-network'. 'More different kinds of personal networks as Commission gets bigger'.

³⁸ The qualifier to this 'no' response was: 'There are still strong personal networks that have developed over time, but enlargement has made the Commission more hierarchical'.

³⁹ One official offered cautioned: 'Barroso is certainly a top-down President but he is also isolated and associated with the failure of the Constitution'.